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ABSTRACT

Factors influencing migrant students in decisions to drop out or graduate from high school were determined in interviews with 24 dropouts and potential dropouts and 22 students who had graduated. Profiles were compiled on each group. Data were collected from twelfth grade migrant students in northern California. The main appeal of school to the dropouts was the social life; teachers and classes were the most disliked aspects of school. Dropouts seemed to experience major family problems, including divorce, death and sickness, much more often than graduates, and the main factor influencing students to drop out was family need, often financial. Irregular attendance was characteristic of 96% of the dropouts. Only 50% felt their parents considered graduation as important and only 25% had siblings who completed high school. Graduates experienced more stable family lives, had families that valued education, attended school regularly, established more positive relationships with teachers, and were more involved in extracurricular activities. Efforts to encourage dropouts to stay in school might include better communication between students and teachers, encouragement of extracurricular activities, inclusion and transition activities for new students, work study and English as a second language programs, and a Migrant Education staff to counsel, befriend, and act as a liaison between students and school staff. (DS)

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FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
TO DROP OUT OR GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL

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Additional information on the Secondary School
Impact Program (work study and counselors/ad-
visors) for Migrant Students in the State of
California is available in the "Final Report,
Secondary Impact Study" produced by Ira Nelken
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FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
TO DROP OUT OR GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL

Analysis of the interviews allowed profiles to be developed for the drop out and the high school graduate migrant student. Factors which were isolated from the interviews as having influenced decisions are presented after the profiles. Conclusions whereby the Migrant Education Program can impact upon the potential drop out are then specified. Finally, additional information from the interviews is detailed.

For the last couple of years, Migrant Education, Region II, in the State of California, has been giving increasing attention to the need to improve services to high school migrant students. The need for improved services comes in part from the success of the migrant program at elementary levels: more migrant students are making it to high school. With the creation of the position of high school advisor, there is the possibility of providing migrant high school students with the personal help and support they need in order to complete high school. The expansion of the work study program will enable even more high school students to meet economic needs and obtain job experience which will make a high school education relevant to further training.

In order to explore the factors which influence particular migrant students in decisions to drop out or graduate from high school, individual interviews were completed with 24 dropouts and potential dropouts and 22 graduates. Community liaisons, who worked most closely with high school students before the creation of the advisor position assisted Ira Nelken & Associates staff in developing an interview format and in making arrangements for the interview. Often, the liaisons or advisors accompanied the Ira Nelken & Associates interviewer so that the student would feel more comfortable in the presence of a familiar person.

The results of the interviews follow. The first section is a profile of both a dropout and a graduate. Items from the questionnaire were used on which there was a high level of agreement among the group interviewed and/or on which there was a striking difference between the answers of the dropouts versus the graduates. Factors, which were isolated from the interviews as having influenced decisions, are presented after each profile.

The results of the interviews follow the profiles. Conclusions and suggestions follow results. Additional information from the interviews, most of which will be redundant after reading the rest of the information, follows the conclusions.

DROPOUT PROFILE

The main appeal of school to the dropouts interviewed was the social life, the opportunity to be with friends. Teachers and classes were the most disliked aspect of school. Teachers were described as uninterested in them as students, and particular, teachers were described as insincere or lacking teaching ability. Some of them did have a favorite teacher, and often that teacher is bilingual. Most dropouts did not participate in extra curricular activities. Most (79 percent) of them have, or have had, difficulties with English. Vocational education courses were the most popular courses, because of their relevancy, and opportunity to succeed. Migrant Education advisors and aides were the most helpful adults.

Dropouts seemed to experience major family problems, including divorce, death, sickness, much more often than graduates. The main factor influencing students to drop out was family need, often financial. Problems with parents, and transportation, were other factors mentioned. A dislike of school, along with one or more of the other factors, always weighted the decision towards dropping out.

Eighty-three percent of the students who had moved experienced moving as increasing their difficulty with school, (graduates felt they had adjusted and learned). Almost all of the dropouts attended school irregularly.

In spite of their family responsibilities and negative experiences with school, 92 percent of the dropouts feel that it is very important to graduate from high

school. Only 50 percent of the dropouts felt their parents valued graduating as important. The majority of the dropouts have other brothers and sisters who have dropped out; only one-fourth of them have siblings who have completed high school.

GRADUATE PROFILE

Graduates said they like classes and learning, 73 percent of the time. Seeing friends was important, but not as important to them as to dropouts, since they were getting some reinforcement from attending classes and learning.

Forty percent of the graduates interviewed could not think of anything they disliked about school. For those who mentioned dislikes, teachers and classes, and school rules and regulations, were most frequently mentioned. Fifty percent of the graduates could name a favorite teacher, and 80 percent a favorite class. Ninety-one percent, or almost all, of the graduates liked school.

More graduates had lived in the United States longer than dropouts, and fewer had moved as often as dropouts, (although the numbers were not greatly different). What appeared to be a significant difference between graduates and dropouts was their attitude toward, and experience with, moving. Ninety-one percent of the graduates felt that moving had been alright, that they had adjusted, and, in many cases, learned from the experience. Three-fourths of the graduates did not miss school on a regular basis, compared to 96 percent of dropouts who did. Most graduates, 91 percent, shared equally with dropouts a valuing of graduating as being very important. Contrasted to dropouts, almost all of the graduate parents shared their valuing of education and encouraged them to finish school.

A majority of the graduates had siblings who had graduated from high school. Over 80 percent of the graduates had future plans, which included junior college or vocational training.

FACTORS INFLUENCING DROPOUTS

Factors:

Family need or crisis

* Lack of role models

Lack of family encouragement

* Poor relationship with teachers

* English language difficulties

* Difficulty of moving, making new friends

* Economic problems, including transportation

*Factors on which Migrant Education staff could have an effect.

Result in:

Poor attendance

Dislike of school

Discipline and academic problems

FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADUATES

Factors:

More stable family life

Families that value education

Role models with siblings

More positive relationships with teachers

Fewer negative effects from moving

Believe completely in the relevancy of their education

Are more involved in extracurricular activities

Result in:

Liking school

Regular attendance

Encouragement to graduate

More contact with bilingual teachers

RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS ON FACTORS INFLUENCING
MIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN DROPPING OUT VERSUS GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

QUESTIONS	Dropouts	Graduates
	n = 24 Percent of Dropouts Mentioning Factor	n = 22 Percent of Graduates Mentioning Factor
1. What did you like best about school?		
Seeing friends	* 54%	32%
Participation in activities	4%	23%
Liked classes and learning	17%	* 73%
2. What did/do you dislike about school?		
Nothing, or don't know	21%	* 41%
Everything	4%	9%
Racial conflict, fights	13%	5%
Alienation, no friends	17%	5%
Teachers and classes	* 63%	27%
Requirements, language difficulties	29%	—
Rules and regulations	17%	23%
3. Do you have a favorite teacher?		
Yes	29%	* 50%
No	* 46%	23%
(13 out of 18 favorite teachers were bilingual)		
4. Do you have a favorite subject?		
No	34%	18%
English as a second language	8%	36%
Vocational classes	* 50%	23%
Other academic classes	21%	27%
5. Do you like to go to school?		
No	46%	* 9%
Yes	58%	* 91%
Why not?		
Dissatisfaction with teachers or classes	* 34%	14%
Language problems	4%	5%
Why?		
Social reasons	17%	14%
6. Did/do you have difficulties with English?		
No, very little	34%	36%
Yes, moderate to alot	* 79%	* 55%
7. Were there people to help you?		
No	46%	46%
Yes	42%	14%
There are now, not before, but help is still too limited	25%	36%
8. Would you have liked more bilingual instruction		
Yes	* 58%	* 46%
9. Do you feel what you've learned will be helpful to you?		
Yes	42%	* 100%
No	17%	
Maybe	13%	
10. What courses have been most helpful?		
English	67%	73%
Vocational education	25%	46%
11. Did/do you participate in clubs or other school activities?		
Yes	21%	50%
No	* 79%	50%
Do you participate in sports?		
Yes	8%	18%

QUESTIONS	Dropouts	Graduates
	n = 24 Percent of Dropouts Mentioning Factor	n = 22 Percent of Graduates Mentioning Factor
12. Do you participate in work study?		
Yes	17% (returned dropouts)	55%
Would you like to participate in work study?		
Yes	* 54%	23%
13. a Who has helped you if you needed help?		
Counselors	13%	27%
Migrant Education advisors, aides	* 42%	23%
Friends or family	25%	14%
b How did they help you?		
Jobs	17%	9%
Stay in school	29%	9%
Classes, tutoring	21%	14%
Personal	13%	—
14. What is your opinion of the counselors in your school?		
Don't know	25%	—
Ok, but busy and too few	29%	55%
Negative - manipulative, pushy	13%	23%
Positive - helpful	21%	32%
15. How long have you lived in the United States?		
One to four years	38%	32%
Four to eight years	34%	27%
Eight plus years	29%	41%
16. Does your family return to Mexico?		
Yes, each year	38%	18%
No	29%	27%
Occasionally	25%	36%
17. Has your family moved frequently?		
Yes	33%	23%
No	* 63%	* 73%
Parents only	4%	5%
18. How has moving affected your life?		
It made things difficult (friends, English, credits)	* 83%	9%
It was alright, I adjusted and learned	21%	* 91%
19. a Have there been many times when you did not attend school?		
Yes	* 96%	23%
b For what reason?		
Work	* 34%	—
Family	13%	23%
Dislike school, bored	* 54%	23%
20. Was it difficult for you to obtain needed credits for graduation?		
Yes	* 71%	23%
21. Do you feel graduating from school is important?		
Yes	* 92%	* 91%
22. How do your parents feel about graduation?		
Very important	50%	* 95%
Not important	25%	5%
Important, but family also needs help and financial support	25%	—

QUESTIONS	Dropouts	Graduates
	n = 24	n = 22
	Percent of Dropouts Mentioning Factor	Percent of Graduates Mentioning Factor
23. Did your parents attend school?		
No	42%	32%
One to six years	42%	47%
Yes, and graduated	8%	14%
24. Do you have brothers or sisters who have left school?		
Yes	* 79%	46%
25. Do you have brothers or sisters who have graduated?		
Yes	25%	* 64%
26. What was the main thing which caused you to drop out of school?		
Family needs	79%	--
Lack of transportation, economics	21%	--
Dislikes school	50%	--
Problems with police	13%	--
Conflicts with parents	38%	--
27. What kind of work or study interests you?		
Don't know, undecided	58%	32%
Manual labor, jobs requiring vocational education	34%	36%
Careers requiring more advanced education	8%	32%
28. What are your future plans?		
Work in agriculture, long term	29%	--
Work in agriculture (summer), temporarily	--	36%
HEP, G.E.D., graduate from high school	34%	--
Get a job, non-agricultural	8%	41%
Get married, care for family	13%	--
Go to Mexico	4%	9%
Go to junior college	21%	68%
Go to military	8%	--
Go to vocational school	--	14%
Don't know	17%	--

* Questions on which there was a high level of agreement in response among those interviewed in a group, or a noteworthy difference between how dropouts versus graduates answered the question.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers

The relationship migrant high school students have with teachers is very important. It can either encourage their eventual graduation or discourage it. Students liked teachers who showed a personal interest in them and disliked those who seemed disinterested and unconcerned. If a student is doing poorly and the teacher offers no help or intervention, then the student sees the teacher as being a "bad" teacher, for him or her.

1. Migrant Education staff can facilitate communication between migrant students and teachers (including intervention).
2. High school teachers can be provided with an awareness of high school migrant students' feelings, academic needs, family responsibilities, and language problems.
3. Once teachers have an awareness of ways they can affect the success of potential dropouts, Migrant Education staff can provide them with materials and methods.
4. Schools can increase bilingual staffing of teachers and aides.

Social Aspect of School

The opportunity to see friends and be with a group was the most often mentioned attraction of school for dropouts. This aspect of school could be developed and used as a motivating factor. Clubs could be formed, participation in existing school activities encouraged, intramural sports activities provided. Many of the dropouts could not have participated in extracurricular activities for the same reasons they eventually dropped out: needing to work and family responsibility. For those students that can, it seems to increase feelings of belonging and commitment to school.

Several students mentioned that there were racial conflicts at their schools. This is an area which needs active intervention on the parts of counselors, teachers, and Migrant Education staff. Education about cultural differences for resident Anglo students, as well as migrant Mexican students, could be provided. Face to face communication and problem solving could be facilitated.

Some students mentioned feeling alone and friendless. This was especially true for those who moved and for whom moving was difficult. Responsible adults could encourage inclusion and transition activities, such as asking a student to show the new student around and introducing him or inviting the student to be part of an existing club or activity. Migrant Education advisors are in a good position to get involved with students and to know enough about them to be able to identify feelings of alienation and exclusion.

Language Difficulties

Difficulties with English were shared, at one time or another, by the majority of students, both dropouts and graduates. The Defense Language Institute Training program, which offers intensive language training, seems to be a logical and efficient solution to needing to become fluent in a second language. Rather than failing in, or being frustrated for years by the demands of classes in English, time is spent first in learning the language, and then regular classes are more helpful and students have a chance to succeed. The Defense Language Institute Training program should be expanded to other high schools in Region II.

Since intensive programs are thus far available in only a few high schools, other methods now being used for English as a second language training should be continued and improved upon. Developing fluency in English is basic to being successful in and graduation from high school.

Sports

Most of the students enjoyed sports, but very few either dropouts or graduates, participated in organized sports for a variety of reasons: low grades; work and family responsibilities; not receiving encouragement from coaches and other adults. Participation in sports is highly motivating for those students who do and gives them another opportunity for success. Some students play soccer after school with friends.

Efforts which Migrant Education staff and schools might make to increase the opportunity for migrant students to participate in sports include: encouragement to those who are interested in going out for a sport; creation of intramural programs; and organization of informal soccer teams.

Work Study

Work study advisors and the work study program were responsible for allowing four dropouts among those interviewed to return to school. One-half of the graduates interviewed were participating in work study and felt that it has greatly affected their ideas about what they might do and the education they might need. The work study program offers an immediate solution to the student who needs to earn some money in order to be able to stay in school. The other benefits which came to participants included feelings of self-confidence for doing a job well, and being needed by their employers; vocational skills; employment skills of interviewing and keeping jobs; increased language skills, and increased interest in school.

The work study program deals with the economic factors that seemed to be as important, if not more so, as school factors, in whether or not a student can stay in school and graduate.

Counselors

Counselors need more information and sensitivity to the special needs of

migrant students both in terms of being successful in school, and making future work and education plans. They should be advised of the programs which might be of special help to migrant students such as HEP.

The new work high school advisor position should increase the contact counselors have with this kind of information, through their relationship with the advisors. Counselors should be included in inservices on needs, methods, and vocational information pertaining to migrant students.

Moving

Students had two kinds of reactions to the moving they had done: either it had made things more difficult, or it had not been a problem; in fact, they had learned from it. Interestingly, most of the dropouts felt it had made things more difficult, and most of the graduates felt it had not been a particular problem. Teachers, counselors, aides, and advisors need to be sensitive to the adjustment problems students entering a school may be experiencing and come up with ways of easing entry into a new school and of facilitating the formation of friendships. Traditional ways used to introduce students are sometimes overlooked when many migrant students are entering at once.

Attendance

Ninety-six percent of the dropouts had irregular attendance. Overall, migrant students have achieved patterns of attendance similar to year round residents. Therefore, irregular attendance should be seen as a sign that the student is becoming less interested in school, is having school related problems, or is having family problems. Prompt attention at this time is more useful than trying to deal with the problem after the student has made a decision to drop out.

Parent Attitude Toward Education

Over 90 percent of dropouts shared with graduates the belief that it was

very important to graduate from high school. What is needed is help in dealing with some of the problems which made them feel it is hopeless, or impossible, at this time. Their wish to graduate can be encouraged and specific plans made with them as to how, including alternatives to returning to school.

Role Models

Most graduates had siblings and friends who had graduated from high school. Only 25 percent of the dropouts had siblings who had graduated. Providing positive role models in aides and advisors seems especially important for potential dropouts. Adults who work with potential dropouts should be aware that there may be few sources of encouragement and support to finish school outside of the school environment.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM INTERVIEWS

Under one-half of the dropouts, as compared to almost all of the graduates, liked school. Those that disliked it said they disliked the mandatory attendance and pressure, racial conflicts, language problems, or were dissatisfied with teachers and classes.

Relationships with teachers were important to both graduates and dropouts. Teachers and classes were named most frequently by dropouts as what they most disliked about school. For students who felt positive about certain teachers, it was because they had helped them with a difficult class or showed an interest in the students' individual needs and personality. A majority of favorite teachers were bilingual.

Language difficulties were either being experienced, or had been experienced at one time, by almost all of the students, both graduates and dropouts. Although many of the students have lived in the United States for most of their lives, Spanish is the primary home language. More dropouts than graduates felt that adequate help with English is being provided. Most of the graduates feel that even

though there is much more help available now than in the past, it is still insufficient to meet individual needs. Most of the students felt that they had to learn English on their own. Those that succeeded in doing this well were the ones most likely to graduate.

A greater need for English as a second language and bilingual instruction was expressed by dropouts, but one-half of the graduates also expressed the desire for improved bilingual instruction. They wanted to improve their Spanish speaking, reading and writing skills. Those opposed to the need for more bilingual instruction reasoned that learning English was more important; they knew their Spanish well enough and preferred an emphasis on English skills.

In response to a question, which class would help them most in the future, most of the dropouts said English. They were aware that mastering bilingual and biliterary skills would be necessary for job applications, junior college entrance, and meeting family needs.

Other common subjects that came up as being valuable learning for dropouts were vocational courses, such as auto mechanics and office skills. Graduate answers were more varied and included academics, though many also found vocational classes useful.

There were few comments on whether students were able to take the classes they wanted, and that also served for graduation. Most said there was not much difficulty in obtaining what interested them and which also served for requirements. Some dropouts were hesitant in taking some courses, because of language problems.

Dropouts also seemed less inclined to join clubs, and graduates were more active in Spanish clubs, and social activities.

Half of the students enjoy sports and seem to be motivated by them, but only a small percentage actually participate in school organized sports. Reasons vary but include low grades, family responsibility, and inexperience with the sport. Soccer was often mentioned as the preferred sport.

Most seemed to enjoy team sports, though few actually belonged on competitive teams (four graduates - two dropouts). Students play after school, amongst their own friends, or not at all, depending on whether they work.

Work study seemed to make a difference in graduation. At least half of the graduates were participating in work study slots, while four former dropouts had jobs which brought them back into school. Dropouts were either uninformed about work study, not eligible, or it was not available. Many of the graduates had jobs through Migrant Education which advisors or counselors helped fill, and this definitely helped keep them in school. This established a good relationship among students and advisors, because they were meeting the students' needs with a program of work experience and financial and school credit benefits. The migrant students felt closer to the Migrant Education advisors than counselors whose objectives for them seemed less relevant, with a stress on academics and procedure.

They expressed that counselors did an adequate job of following their records and making sure their classes were suitable, but that they didn't feel they were personable or sincerely interested in their individual needs.

The length of stay in the United States was higher among graduates. Families of dropouts moved more frequently, or had more recently arrived from Mexico. Almost half of the graduates interviewed have lived in the United States at least eight years, with the others not far behind.

The adjustment to school and moving seems to have been easier for the graduates. Most live in the same area for several years, and trips to Mexico are short vacations, rather than extended stays.

Dropouts reported that the frequent moving has affected their relations with friends. They also said that it was hard to keep up in age and grade to school requirements for passing and transfer of credits. Graduates said their moving

has not affected them in any negative ways, but rather they have learned from the experience in cultural differences.

There was a contrast in attendance among graduates, compared to that of dropouts. Dropouts were absent frequently from school for family, financial, emotional, and cultural reasons.

Those graduating seemed to come from more well adjusted and stable home situations. It was not necessary for them to work, therefore they were more likely to keep up with and benefit from their school work.

Parental attitude also seems to have a significant effect on migrant student graduation. Almost all of the graduates interviewed said their parents felt graduation was important for bettering their child's lives and meeting family needs. About half of dropouts had parents who agreed with the importance of the diploma, and the other half stated that their parents viewed graduation as useless, that the teenager is of prime age to start working and gaining experience. Other parents were impartial and would go along with the student's decision to dropout or finish. Some parents felt that the realities of their financial need overrode the benefits of graduating from high school.

Both graduates and dropouts agreed that graduation is important. Only a few more dropouts than graduates felt that their diploma would not be of use to them; that they would probably just continue working or get married, and it wouldn't matter if they finished or not. On the other hand, most graduates expressed the need to obtain a diploma to pursue work outside of agriculture and as an indication of their abilities in English and other subjects.

Very few parents of both groups of migrant students attended more than a few years of school. Average length of attendance was between two and four years. Most had to work. It was for a more privileged class.

More dropouts were familiar with other family members or friends who had dropped out. More graduates had siblings and friends who had also graduated.

This seems to be both an indication of the importance of role models, and that we are influenced by the values of people close to us.

The influences upon a dropout to leave school were most frequently family and personal problems outside of school, rather than a specific school related problem. Often both went together: problems in their home lives affected their motivation and opportunity to learn, as well as the ability to make friends and get along with others.

More graduates than dropouts were influenced and motivated by school staff, family, or friends. They seemed to receive more encouragement from counselors, parents, and friends. About half of the graduates and a percentage of dropouts said that no one great influence, outside of themselves, made much difference in their decision to finish or leave school.

Most of the students interviewed were uncertain about their future plans. Graduates were anxious to be finishing school.

Most dropouts had plans to work in a job which they already had experience with, such as auto mechanics, housework, secretary, carpentry, etc.

The graduates that did have a particular direction of interest seemed to be drawn more toward careers with a need for higher education, but would probably work in agriculture until they find another job, or until the fall semester at a junior college begins.

Very few planned to return to Mexico. Most planned to pursue careers or areas of study in the United States.